

Message Text

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ACTION AF-04

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P R 161146Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 628

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BAMAKO 198

STADIS

LIMDIS

NOFORN

E.O. 111652: N/A

TAGS: PBOR MASS FR ML UV

SUBJ: MALI-UPPER VOLTA BORDER DISPUTE: THE FRENCH POSITION

REF: STATE 6820

1. SITUATION ON MALI-UPPER VOLTA BORDER DISPUTE REMAINS TENSE. I HAVE JUST RECEIVED FOLLOWING HISTORY OF AFFAIR FROM FRENCH AMBASSADOR DALLIER WHO HAS BEEN IN FREQUENT CONTACT WITH PRESIDENT TRAORE ON THIS SUBJECT.

2. UNCERTAIN DEMARCATION OF BORDER DATES WELL BACK INTO DAYS OF FRENCH ADMINISTRATION. IN THOSE DAYS, THE AREA IN QUESTION WAS OCCUPIED BY A NUMBER OF NOMADS SOME OF WHOM PAID TAXES TO DJIBO (IN WHAT IS NOW UPPER VOLTA), SOME TO
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HOMBORI (IN WHAT IS NOW MALI) AND SOME TO BANDIAGARA (NOW

MALI). WHEN THERE WERE TERRITORIAL OR OTHER DISPUTES THE THREE FRENCH GOVERNORS IN THE AFOREMENTIONED CIRCLES WOULD SIMPLY GET TOGETHER "OVER A GOOD LUNCH" AND SETTLE THE QUESTION. AS FAR AS THE FRENCH WERE CONCERNED, THE ACTUAL BORDER WAS NEVER DEFINITELY DEMARCATED BECAUSE THERE WAS NO NEED TO DO SO. AT THE TIME OF INDEPENDENCE A MIXED MALI-UPPER VOLTAN COMMISSION WAS ESTABLISHED TO TRY TO RESOLVE QUESTIONS THAT AROSE FROM THE UNCERTAIN BORDER SITUATION. AT THAT TIME THE TOTAL LENGTH OF THIS DISPUTED BOUNDARY WAS ABOUT 300 KILOMETERS BUT DURING THE COURSE OF THE MIXED COMMISSION'S MEETINGS ABOUT 150 KILOMETERS WAS AGREED. APPARENTLY, THE MIXED COMMISSION CEASED MEETING UNTIL PRESIDENT LAMIZANA CAME TO POWER AT WHICH TIME IT WAS REACTIVATED. THE PRESENT CRISIS BEGAN ON SEPTEMBER 4 DURING A MEETING OF THE REACTIVATED COMMISSION IN DJIBO. THAT MEETING, ACCORDING TO DALLIER, WAS VERY STORMY. THE VOLTAN MINISTER OF INTERIOR ANNOUNCED THAT PRESIDENT LAMIZANA HAD DECIDED THAT HE WOULD NOT DISCUSS EXPULSION OF ALL MALIAN NATIONALS FROM THE DISPUTED AREA. MALIAN DEFENSE, INTERIOR AND SECURITY MINISTER DOUKARA CAME AWAY FROM THE MEETING VERY AGITATED, SAYING THAT HE WAS GOING TO ENSURE THAT MALIAN NATIONALS WERE PROTECTED AND HE THEREUPON ORDERED TROOPS TO MOVE TO THE AREA. LAMIZANA THEN SENT AN EMISSARY TO DJIBO TO SAY HE WISHED THE TALKS TO CONTINUE, BUT DOUKARA HAD ALREADY LEFT. THERE THEN OCCURRED AT LEAST TWO INCIDENTS INVOLVING EXCHANGES OF FIRE. THE DETAILS SURROUNDING THESE INCIDENTS DEPEND ON WHETHER ONE IS TALKING TO A MALIAN SOURCE OR A VOLTAIC SOURCE. THE FIRST OCCURRED WHEN A VOLTAIC CONVOY, WHICH ACCORDING TO MALIAN SOURCES WAS CARRYING AMMUNITION, WAS ATTACKED BY MALIAN TROOPS IN THE DISPUTED AREA. (ACCORDING TO VOLTAIC SOURCES THE CONVOY WAS ONLY CARRYING GRAIN.) THE SECOND INCIDENT OCCURRED SOMETIME LATER WHEN APPARENTLY THE VOLTAICS SENT A MILITARY FORCE INTO THE AREA TO EXPEL THE MALIAN FORCES. THE MALIANS WERE MUCH BETTER ARMED THAN THE VOLTAICS AND THE LATTER RETIRED WITH ONE OR TWO FATALITIES.

3. IN THE MEANTIME THE BATTLE OF NEWSPAPER COMMENTS WAS GOING ON AND ACCORDING TO DALLIER THE MALIAN PRESIDENT

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WAS EXTREMELY INCENSED BY THE TENOR OF THE COMMENTARIES OF OUAGADOUGOU AND BOBO-DIOULASSO, STIMULATED BY THE NEWSPAPER AND RADIO COMMENTARY IN UPPER VOLTA BEGAN ATTACKING MALIANS RESIDENT IN UPPER VOLTA. ACCORDING TO DALLIER THE FRENCH EMBASSY IN OUAGADOUGOU HAS REPORTED THAT THEY HAVE FIRM INFORMATION THAT AT LEAST 20 MALIANS WERE KILLED IN THOSE TWO CITIES AND SCORES WOUNDED AND MUTILATED. IN MALI THERE HAS BEEN NO ACTION TAKEN AGAINST ANY UPPER VOLTAN

AND THE GOVERNMENT OF MALI HAS PUBLICLY CALLED UPON THE PEOPLE NOT TO TAKE REPRISALS AGAINST THEIR UPPER VOLTAN BROTHERS LIVING HERE. AT THE SAME TIME, PRESIDENT TRAORE, WHILE ASSURING THE AMBASSADOR THAT THERE WILL BE NO REPRISAL, HAS REPEATEDLY SAID THAT THE MALIAN ARMY WILL PROTECT ITS NATIONALS IN UPPER VOLTA.

4. PRESIDENT TRAORE APPROACHED THE FRENCH AFTER THE HARASSMENT OF MALIANS IN UPPER VOLTA AND ASKED THEM TO INTERVENE WITH PRESIDENT LAMIZANA TO BRING A HALT TO SUCH ACTIONS. SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH THIS REQUEST, WHICH DALLIER FORWARDED TO PARIS, THE LOME MEETING TOOK PLACE. THUS, WHEN TRAORE RETURNED TO MALI DECEMBER 27 DALLIER HAD A LETTER FOR HIM FROM GISCARD D'ESTAING CONGRATULATING HIM ON THE LOME MEETING AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MIXED COMMISSION AND PROMISING HIM (AND PRESIDENT LAMIZANA IN A SEPARATE MESSAGE) THAT FRANCE WOULD COOPERATE FULLY WITH THE COMMISSION AND FURNISH WHATEVER DOCUMENTATION IT HAD TO ASSIST IN ESTABLISHING THE BORDER. AT THIS POINT DALLIER SAID THAT GIVEN THE SITUATION PRIOR TO INDEPENDENCE HE DID NOT THINK THE DOCUMENTS WOULD PROVE DECISIVE.

5. DALLIER SAW TRAORE IMMEDIATELY UPON HIS RETURN FROM LOME AND HE SAID THAT TRAORE WAS MOST DISSATISFIED WITH THE LOME MEETING. FURTHER, HE SAID THAT TIEKORO BAGAYOKO, (MEMBER OF RULING MILITARY COMMITTEE AND CHIEF OF SECURITY), WHOM HE DESCRIBES AS THE LEADER OF THE HARD-LINE FACTION HERE, WAS MOST DISPLEASED WITH TRAORE'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE MIXED COMMISSION. DALLIER QUOTED TRAORE AS SAYING AS RECENTLY AS YESTERDAY (JANUARY 14) THAT AS LONG AS THE HARASSMENT OF MALIANS CONTINUED IN UPPER VOLTA HE HAD NO INTENTION OF WITHDRAWING HIS TROOPS.

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INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L FINAL SECTION OF 2 BAMAKO 0198

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6. TO EVERYONE'S SURPRISE, MINISTER OF DEFENSE DOUKARA RETURNED TO BAMAKO JANUARY 15 AFTER HAVING VISITED MOSCOW AND PARIS BUT WITHOUT HAVING GONE TO WASHINGTON OR BONN. DALLIER SAYS THAT THE FRENCH AMBASSADOR IN MOSCOW BELIEVES THAT THE SOVIETS REFUSED TO SUPPLY ANY ARMS TO DOUKARA. IN PARIS, DOUKARA SAW ONLY MINISTER OF COOPERATION ABELIN, WAS RECEIVED IN A PRIVATE CAPACITY, AND DID NOT DISCUSS ARMS PROCUREMENT WHILE THERE. DALLIER IS EXTREMELY WORRIED ANOTHER INCIDENT AND CONSIDERS DOUKARA'S RETURN AT THIS TIME TO BE A BAD SIGN. DALLIER SAID THAT THE FRENCH POSITION IS SIMPLY NOT TO TAKE SIDES AND THEY HAVE NO INTENTION OF FURNISHING ARMS TO EITHER COUNTRY. HE COMMENTED THAT FRANCE FINDS ITSELF IN A DIFFICULT SITUATION PARTICULARLY IN UPPER VOLTA BECAUSE THE UPPER VOLTANS ACCUSE THE FRENCH OF HAVING SUPPLIED MORE ARMS TO MALI. CONFIDENTIAL

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IN POINT OF FACT, SAID DALLIER, OVER THE YEARS FRANCE HAS PROBABLY SUPPLIED MORE ARMS TO UPPER VOLTA BUT MALIAN MILITARY SUPERIORITY DERIVES FROM SOVIET AND CHINESE TANKS AND ROCKET LAUNCHERS AS WELL AS THEIR SUPERIOR TRAINING.

7. COMMENT: IF FAULT CAN BE ASCRIBED IN THIS PARTICULAR AFFAIR DALLIER AND I BOTH FEEL IT MUST BE SHARED EQUALLY. HOSTILITIES WERE PRECIPITATED BY THE MALIANS BUT PROVOCATION AROSE FROM THE UPPER VOLTAN EXPULSION OF MALIANS FROM AN ADMITTEDLY DISPUTED AREA. I SERIOUSLY DOUBT, AND DALLIER AGREES, THAT THERE ARE ANY ULTERIOR OR MYSTERIOUS MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE CONTINUED MALIAN OCCUPATION OF THE DISPUTED AREA. RATHER, I FEEL THAT THE SITUATION DEVELOPED ITS OWN MOMENTUM FOLLOWING THE MALIAN DESPATCH OF TROOPS TO THE AREA AND THE SUBSEQUENT HARASSMENT OF MALIANS IN UPPER VOLTA. IN OTHER WORDS, I DO NOT GIVE ANY CREDENCE TO DIVERT PUBLIC ATTENTION FROM ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES OR ANY

PERSONAL POWER STRUGGLE. INTERESTINGLY, THE RUMORS HERE ARE THE MIRROR IMAGE OF THOSE IN OUAGADOUGOU, I.E. THAT LAMIZANA CANNOT CONTROL THE YOUNGER MILITANTS IN HIS GOVERNMENT OR THAT HE IS TRYING TO DIVERT ATTENTION FROM THE ECONOMIC SITUATION IN UPPER VOLTA. CLEARLY THE DISPUTE IS NOT POPULAR IN MALI AND ALMOST EVERYONE HERE HOPES THAT IT WILL SOMEHOW BE RESOLVED PEACEFULLY. BAMAKO ITSELF IS CALM, THERE HAS BEEN NO PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THE BORDER DISPUTE SINCE TRAORE'S RETURN FROM LOME AND THERE HAS BEEN NO HARASSMENT OF UPPER VOLTANS. NONETHELESS, THE SITUATION REMAINS DANGEROUS. THE ONE HOPEFUL NOTE IS THAT VIRTUALLY ALL AFRICAN CHIEFS OF STATE ARE DEEPLY WORRIED AND ARE EXERTING THEIR BEST EFFORTS TO BRING ABOUT AN ACCEPTABLE SOLUTION.

8. WITH RESPECT TO FURNISHING ARMS AID TO EITHER COUNTRY WHETHER BY CASH OR CREDIT, FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE IN BAMAKO IT WOULD SEEM THAT NO MATTER HOW EVEN-HANDED WE WOULD TRY TO BE WE COULD ONLY LOSE ON ONE SIDE OR THE OTHER. IT IS NOT CLEAR TO ME THAT THERE IS ANY AMERICAN INTEREST TO BE SERVED BY SO DOING. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, OUR BEST COURSE OF ACTION SHOULD BE TO STAY AS FAR AWAY FROM THIS ONE AS POSSIBLE.

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